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*** ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE * CONSERVATION LANDS FOUNDATION * NORTHERN ALASKA ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER * PACIFIC ENVIRONMENT * SIERRA CLUB * THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY ***

Feds OK first permanent road in NPR-A
Conservation groups call for balance with strong management of protected areas

Anchorage, Alaska – Today, the Alaska Office of the Bureau of Land Management issued its Record of Decision for the first commercial development project, [Greater Mooses Tooth Unit 1](#), within the National Petroleum Reserve–Alaska (Reserve). This decision allows for construction of a permanent, 8-mile road through the Reserve’s sensitive wetlands and tundra, which will cause lasting impacts on the region’s wildlife and subsistence values. This decision comes just weeks after the administration announced a recommendation for Wilderness designations within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and areas to be withdrawn from development within the Arctic Ocean.

As the Bureau moves forward with permitting oil and gas development within the Reserve, it should also be allocating equal resources toward proactively managing its five designated Special Areas for conservation and wildlife values. In response to the final Record of Decision on GMT-1 permitting, the conservation community calls on the Bureau to commit all necessary resources for a landscape level planning process that will ensure the strongest future protection possible for each of the Reserve’s Special Areas.

The GMT-1 project represents a significant piece in the growing cumulative impacts associated with oil and gas development in the Arctic. The Obama administration’s 2013 [Integrated Activity Plan](#) allows for leasing access to 72 percent of the Reserve’s economically recoverable oil while also setting aside Special Areas to protect wildlife, subsistence and wilderness characteristics. Lands outside of Special Area boundaries include important wildlife corridors making it essential that GMT-1 and future projects set the highest standards for development by requiring best available technologies and the smallest-possible footprint to minimize impacts to this fragile, wildlife-rich landscape.

Statements from conservation groups:

“We are disappointed that BLM’s final decision fails to prioritize proceeding in the most environmentally sensitive way possible, as Greater Mooses Tooth will set the tone for all future development in the Reserve and its cumulative impacts will be felt throughout the Reserve and surrounding communities,” said **Cindy Shogan**, Executive Director of **Alaska Wilderness League**. “This development will take place just a short distance away from the Teshekpuk Lake and Colville River Special Areas, lands set aside for conservation because their wildlife and subsistence values make them simply too precious to drill, so it is critical that any development within the Reserve ensures the values of the Reserve’s Special Areas remain protected.”

“BLM has fallen short on its duty to manage our public lands with the strongest protections for the Arctic's fragile wetlands and wildlife,” said **Lindsey Hajduk**, Alaska Program Director for the **Conservation Lands Foundation**. “The only good that can come out of this decision is if BLM steps up and further protects the Reserve's Special Areas for future generations to enjoy.”

"This decision puts the fragile and important wetlands of the western Arctic at risk from the growing cumulative impacts of oil development. To offset this the administration needs to put in place permanent protections for the special places of America's Arctic," said **Dan Ritzman**, Alaska Program Director for **Sierra Club's** Our Wild America campaign. "The dirty fuel industry shouldn't be allowed to subvert the importance of these areas for wildlife, subsistence traditions, and Americans' sense of wild."

"The decision to allow a permanent road in the western Arctic sets a terrible precedent for our public lands," said **Kevin Harun**, Alaska Program Director for **Pacific Environment**. "This landscape should be managed to protect wildlife and their movements, but instead allows permanent damage to fragile Arctic ecosystems."

"We are disappointed that BLM's final decision encroaches a buffer zone that exists to protect the Fish Creek area and its valuable subsistence resources for local communities," said Nicole Whittington-Evans, Alaska regional director for **The Wilderness Society**. "We will work with BLM to ensure that Special Areas and values of the reserve are protected and future decisions by BLM adhere to the Integrated Activity Plan, which balances conservation and energy development."

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